CANADIAN FILM INSTITUTE

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JOHN GRIERSON

Some of the more familiar landmarks won't be there when John Grierson comes east from Vancouver next month. For instance, he won't be able to see the old saw-mill on John Street which he converted into a film factory with a fabulous output during the war. But the West Block where it all began, still stands and he will have renewed acquaintance with the railway hotels across the country.

To go right back to the beginning, being hired by Grierson was an experience which few will forget. The prospective employee hardly ever opened his mouth. He simply sat in the office for an hour or two while Film Board satellites continued to orbit round the Film Commissioner. Several conferences took place simultaneously - long distance phone calls one after another. Quick decisions were reached: people in Washington and more distant points might be hired (or fired), and then finally you were sent out and told to report to someone or other, and the next day you found yourself on a train, familiarizing yourself with a camera - or the techniques of script-writing. If Grierson thought you could do a job for the Film Board, it never occurred to you to question his belief. And so it went, from 1939 to 1945: films turned out, speeches made, articles written, conferences by the score, a stint as Head of the Wartime Information Board, all directed towards the important job of educating and informing the public. "Education is activist or it is nothing."

To tell the people of Canada about their war effort, he mobilized a film operation from nothing, and that meant not only making films but distributing them in the theatres commercially - they had to be slick enough for that - and setting up a great network of rural circuits with shows brought to the church halls and classrooms by the Film Board representative, who used to do his own projection in those days. The basic organization, changing to meet new circumstances, which Grierson created, is the National Film Board. Writing of its progress half-way through the War, he said "much of it has been pulled off the sky". What Grierson pulled off the sky in 1942 became in 1956 the most modern studio for film production on the North American continent. Some of us are wondering what the "Old Man" is going to think about the new shop. We know for sure he won't be dazzled by it. He'll want to know if we're still doing the job of public education through film which he started here in Canada.

Grierson was born in Scotland, the son of a school teacher, and served in the first war on minesweepers. He graduated in philosophy from Glasgow University (another distinguished graduate is Stewart Bates of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation), and in 1924 came to the U.S. on a Rockefeller Fellowship, to study the press, the cinema and other instruments affecting public opinion.

In 1927, he returned to the U.K. and through the understanding and sympathy of Sir Stephen Tallents, was able to make "Drifters" for the Empire Marketing Board. "Drifters", which, by the way, had its premiere before the London Film Society in 1929, is at once the first "Documentary" film, for Grierson used this word to describe it, and one of the first ventures into film production by any Commonwealth government.

During the next four years, Grierson built up a film unit - much as he was later to do it in Canada - by attracting a young and enthusiastic group around him and inspiring them to heights and depths which they didn't know they possessed. Elton, Stuart Legg, Spottiswoode, Basil Wright, are the names of some of those who joined him then and moved over to the General Post Office when the Marketing Board was dissolved. "Night Mail", "Song of Ceylon", Coal Face", British documentaries, which later were to inspire a whole genre of British films ("Target for To-night", "The Way to the Stars", "The Way Ahead", and many others) were produced in this period.

He came to Canada first in 1938, and the Film Act, establishing his position as Commissioner and giving him overall responsibility for Government film activity, was passed in 1939. It was not until 1941, however, that he took over the Motion Picture Bureau on John Street and really began to roll.

When the War was over, after a spell in New York, he returned to the United Kingdom and became Films Officer at the Central Office of Information in London. He was soon asked to become producer of the Group 3 series of features designed to give a chance to promising young talent in the English motion picture industry, then perhaps tending too much to produce formula pictures along lines thought to be sure-fire at the box office. Once again he tackled this new job with amazing energy and a number of fine films resulted, among them, "Brandy for the Parson" and "The Brave don't Cry". Kenneth More, now playing Bader in "Reach for the Sky" was discovered by Group 3, as were some promising young directors.

John Grierson (continued)

As John Grierson flies over the Arctic on his way from Amsterdam to Vancouver, he will actually be flying along a route which he foretold in "Global Air Routes" (1944) would become a major factor in our strategic concepts. But he won't be thinking about that - he'll be looking ahead again. So far he has not essayed the television field, but this new medium of mass communication is bound to interest him. Perhaps some of the work done by Canadians will in turn give him new ideas for television production in the U.K. But now and in the future, for Grierson there's the job of public education.

> "The first problem of education today is essentially one of understanding the technological world in which we live and every force which directs its development has something of importance to say. People will realize their worth all the better for knowing what railroads do for farmers, what telephones do for trade, what radio does for air lines and what automobiles do for both private amenity and public knowledge. The problems of interrelationship, which lie at the root of modern citizenship and therefore challenge us to new ways of management, all have a technological basis. I cannot think of a gas pipe or electric wire or road or ship or plane or factory that has not something to say."
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> (From Grierson on Documentary, Forsyth Hardy)

Michael Spencer.

NEW FILMS

LET'S DISCUSS IT 29 mins sd. b & w $3.00
Produced by National Film Board for
Department of Citizenship & Immigration, 1956
A presentation of group discussion methods, demonstrating the principles by which healthy and active discussion may be maintained. The camera moves around among several groups meeting in a hall to illustrate ways of eliciting participation. The film describes steps in organizing a group and procedures a discussion leader may follow for effective and satisfying discussion.

DESIGNED FOR LIVING 11 mins sd. b&w Free
Produced by the National Film Board for the
Design Centre of the National Gallery of Canada 1956
What Canada is accomplishing in the field of industrial design, and how the National Industrial Design Council is encouraging good design for contemporary living are illustrated in this film in a wide selection of household articles. The film defines good design, providing a yardstick for the consumer to use in assessing the merits of manufactured goods ranging from kitchen utensils to living room furniture.

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BLUE SHEET

The response to our letter regarding the Canadian Estimates of Selected Entertainment Films has been so much in favour that we will continue to include this in our mailings to members.

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NEW GIRL GUIDE FILM

THE WIDER WORLD, a new 30-minute, colour film portraying Girl Guide and Girl Scout Community service projects in four countries is now available from C.F.I. at a service charge of $3.00. The film is designed to show how girls all over the world put into practice their Girl Guide promise "to help other people at all times". Shows typical groups of girls in the United States, Mexico, Finland and Rangoon, Burma, helping make their own communities better places in which to live, and by so doing, opening doors to a wider world of responsibility and understanding.

NINTH ANNUAL CANADIAN FILM AWARDS

This year's CANADIAN FILM AWARDS will feature People, Projects and Pictures. Nominations will be open until April 29th.

The three categories of Awards for which nominations will be received are...

1. People or organizations who have made significant contributions to Canadian film making.

2. Current projects which raise the standards of Canadian film making.

3. Outstanding Pictures which have contributed to Canadian film making.

Canadian Film Awards is in its tenth year and is sponsored by the Canadian Film Institute, The Canada Foundation and the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

Nomination forms for the 1957 Awards may be obtained from any of the sponsoring organizations or from the Manager, Canadian Film Awards, 142 Sparks Street, Ottawa 4.

NEW FREE SPONSORED FILM

MILLING AND SMELTING THE SUDBURY NICKEL ORES
54 mins sd. col.
A brochure of the above film is included in the mailing that brought you this issue. The film may now be borrowed without charged from Canadian Film Institute. The Scientific Division of C.F.I. have produced an evaluation of this film. Copies of same may be obtained upon request.

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

This year Mental Health Week will take place April 28 - May 4 — both in Canada and in the United States.

Why not encourage your church group, service club or home and school association to feature a mental health film either during, or close to Mental Health Week. Catalogues and information sheets of suitable films available from C.F.I. on request.

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Note: It has been noticed lately that films are being returned much later than the due back date. Should you be the "guilty party" we hope you realize that you may be the cause of someone else not receiving their films on time. We ask your co-operation in this matter. Please see that the films you borrow are returned to us promptly.

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